

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

Nothing Has Changed (Everything Has Changed)

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Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)

Genre: Adult Losers Club (IT), Coming Out, Dorny Little Secwet, Homophobic Language, Hurt/Comfort, Internalized Homophobia, Light Angst, M/M, Pennywise is part of the Losers Club, Pennywise outs Richie and the rest of the Losers Club is floored, Possibly Unrequited Love, Realistic small-town 80s kids and attitudes, Takes place in a deleted scene where Pennywise torments them at the B&B, that's basically it

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier

Relationships: Bill Denbrough & Mike Hanlon & Ben Hanscom & Eddie Kaspbrak & Beverly Marsh & Richie Tozier, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

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Summary:

Pennywise says, "Richie, truth or dare?" and Bill barely registers the words, because it's Richie, and when has Richie ever been bothered by Pennywise's taunts?

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They heard the clown's quip — of course they did — but none of them genuinely registered it. For Bill, at least, the words automatically filtered through one ear and out the other, purely because it started with, "Richie," and Richie could bear Pennywise's taunts better than any of them.

So Bill heard the words, "Richie, truth or dare?" but he didn't *really* hear them until he realized that Richie had stopped moving and that, most peculiar of all, he hadn't said anything back. No snappy comeback, no shitty joke, no funny voices.

Nothing.

Bill looked over his shoulder, caught the frozen expression on Richie's face, and stopped walking, too. Around him, he felt more than saw the others falter and pause — first Bev, still sharply attuned to Bill's movements, then Ben almost simultaneously, then Mike. Eddie had stopped even before Bill, all of them half-turned to keep Pennywise in sight.

And Richie, at the very back of the group with his face tight and his eyes darting from one of them to the next, still didn't say a word.

"I'll tell them if you don't, Richie," said Pennywise, his voice settling over them like a bubble of oil. "I'm *dying* to tell."

It was ludicrous, thought Bill. There was nothing Richie could hide from any of them — no dark secrets he could possibly have kept hidden all through their childhoods, nothing he of all people would be too sensitive to share. It was Richie, after all. Just this morning he'd told them about the time he ate seventeen burritos, puked, and shit himself. He wasn't exactly known for his shyness.

So all Bill's instincts screamed that Pennywise was bluffing.

And Richie's reaction, his dead silence and the sheer dread in his eyes, said otherwise.

It felt like the silence wore on for hours, but it couldn't have been more than a few seconds. Eddie felt like his senses were heightened, like he could see things he never had before. The droplets of sweat in Richie's hair, the moisture left behind when he licked his lips, the way his muscles twitched beneath his shirt and his pupils had shrunk, almost hidden by the glare off his glasses.

He saw all these things, and somewhere in the middle of the automatic catalog of gestures and reactions Eddie was creating in his head, he realized he was waiting for Richie to open his mouth and brush Pennywise's words away with some smartass remark.

But he didn't.

He couldn't, Eddie knew.

So Eddie did it instead.

"What'd you do this time?" he said, and his voice was loud and caustic and exasperated — and perfect. "Don't tell me you actually fucked my mom, Trashmouth, I swear to God—"

It almost worked; he saw Richie's eyes flicker to him, saw something in them change, caught the quick lift of Richie's lips as he automatically went for a response.

And then Pennywise's voice cut through them again, gleeful and low.

"It's not your mom he's interested in, Eddie."

"Fuck off," said Richie, with a casual shrug. That simple jerk of his shoulder filled Eddie with inordinate relief. "Guys, I admit it. 'Twas I who killed Mr. Boddy — you might as well know now. In the library. With the shillelagh, of course; the bastard was stealing all my best material."

"Your best *what?*" said Eddie.

Richie grimaced at him. Across the room, Pennywise watched them all with a leer twisting his wet lips, his eyes staring in different directions. Richie's words had been fine — had been almost enough to set everyone at ease — but his voice had been all wrong. Too flat

on the delivery, and trembling just enough for anyone who knew him well to notice.

And everyone in the room, for better or worse, knew him well.

It's not your mom he's interested in, Eddie.

Maybe the boys didn't understand right away, but Bev did. It was like all her memories of Richie were shelved in a dark room and someone had just reached in to turn on the light. She remembered how they'd danced together one summer in their early teens — just she and Richie — and how she'd marveled even at the time over how comfortable she was with him, how natural it felt to dance with her hands on his waist or to sit with their hips and shoulders touching. Like there were no expectations on her, like Richie would never ask her to kiss him afterward or go to bed. It felt just as casual as dancing with one of the girls at school.

She'd never figured out why she felt that way around him, why she didn't feel that way around Bill or the other boys — why it seemed so different when she caught Richie staring at her than when she caught Ben (how Richie would smirk and waggle his eyebrows when he got caught; how Ben, in contrast, blushed and looked away). Why she never once considered that *he* might have written the poem.

Now she knew.

She understood in one moment; her heart broke in the next. All their childhood he'd been living with this secret, and twenty-seven years after that. She'd seen his stand-up on late-night TV; there were jokes about girlfriends, jokes about nightclubs and one-night stands, but no references to this.

She looked at Ben and Bill, their unsuspecting expressions. Looked at Eddie, confusion and exasperation masking his concern, his eyes locked on Richie's color-drained face.

Caught eyes with Mike and knew he understood, too.

Richie wasn't out.

He'd always thought, in a way, that Richie was immune to It in a way none of the rest of them were. He knew how Stan's skin crawled at disorder, at imperfection, and how Pennywise exploited it. He knew how the clown preyed on all the grown-up fears lurking below each child's surface — Bill's guilt over Georgie and Bev's fear of her father, his own deep insecurities and longing for his old life, for his dad.

What was there to exploit when it came to Richie? Nothing. There was nothing deeper to be analyzed when Pennywise showed himself to Richie. No hidden symbols in the forms he took, no traumas to unearth.

Richie, Ben told himself, was afraid of clowns, so Pennywise took the form of a clown. Richie, like everyone else in the world, was afraid of death, so Pennywise showed him his own face on a missing poster. It was as simple as that.

Richie didn't have secrets. He wouldn't freeze at the words, "Truth or dare."

So why *had* he frozen?

And why did Bev have that heartbroken look on her face? It couldn't be that Richie was secretly interested in *her*. For one thing, there had never been a reason for Richie to hide it. They'd *all* had crushes on Bev at some point — even Eddie, even Stan — and if Richie had shared that with them, why pretend to be uninterested all this time? What could he gain from that, and was he even capable of such nuanced acting? Could *any* child fake his way through the level of flustered embarrassment mixed with disinterest that Richie had displayed as a kid whenever Bev flirted with him for a joke?

But that *had* to be what Pennywise was getting at.

And Bev must have known, because why else would she look so sad?

He kept his eyes more on Pennywise than on the others, so he was the first one to notice when the clown's misshapen mouth expanded, jaw dislocating and lips stretching to an impossible width. It was impossible, he told himself, that the clown would take them all here

in the inn. He was seasoning them, that was all — frightening them a little at a time so they would taste all the better when their time finally came.

Still, Mike didn't quite believe it, and when Pennywise's head exploded and showered them all in paper sheets, he flinched just as bad as everyone else, even though he'd been watching carefully the whole time.

He snatched one of the sheets out of the air as it brushed the side of his face, barely glancing at the graphic printed on one side.

A photo of Richie. Silver calligraphy, the type used on wedding invitations.

Mike crumpled it in his fist, not bothering to read it, and turned around in time to see Eddie scoop one up, to see Richie standing with his mouth open and his eyes tracking the falling slips of paper in horror.

And then, as the first few fliers hit the floor, Richie turned without a word and left the room.

They could hear the door to Richie's room slam shut, and it occurred to Bill — just for a second — that they should guard the fire escape in case he tried to sneak out again while they were all distracted. The fliers had faded, as had the peculiar scent of rotten water and cotton candy Pennywise carried with him, and Bill was still staring at the floor with his mouth set in a frown.

He'd seen the picture of Richie on the flier. He'd seen the silver calligraphy.

He'd seen the words "cordially invites you to—" but that was it. He hadn't had time to read the whole thing before it disappeared.

"We should go after him," said Bev.

Bill turned to look at her, struck suddenly by how far away she seemed, though she was only on the other side of the sitting room. Her arms were crossed tightly over her abdomen, fingers digging into

bare skin. She stared out the open doorway at the stairs Richie had run up just seconds before.

“No,” said Mike slowly. “I don’t know — I don’t think we should.”

“What the *fuck* was that all about?” said Eddie. He’d been holding a flier a second ago; now he scowled at his empty hands.

“Seemed straightforward to me,” said Ben. His eyes were on Bev; he looked dazed, like he’d been struck on the temple and hadn’t quite gotten his wits back yet.

“Not my mom he’s interested in,” Eddie repeated, still staring at his hands. “And the flier — did you see what the flier said?”

Nobody answered. Bill parsed it over in his head; the only words he’d seen clearly, *cordially invites you to*, scrolled through his mind on endless repeat.

“The Losers Club cordially—” said Bev.

“—invites you t-to—” said Bill.

“—the holy union—” Mike supplied.

“—of Trashmouth Tozier—” said Ben.

“—and Eddie Spaghetti Kaspbrak,” Eddie finished. His mouth was a thin, grim line. He closed his hands slowly, turning them into fists, and let them fall to his sides.

Silence filled the room, more oppressive than even Pennywise’s presence a few moments before. Bill stared around the room, but only Mike would meet his eyes. The rest steadily avoided his gaze, even Bev. Eddie’s mouth was working and Bill could tell he wanted to scream, but he had no idea which emotion would be fueling the outburst — rage or grief or pure mindless hysteria.

“So how long...” Bev started, but she bit her lip and shook her head, not finishing the sentence. Still, Bill thought he knew what she wanted to say.

It was Ben who spoke next, looking out at them all with an unreadable look in his eyes. "Can we really trust anything It says?" he asked. "I mean ...". He looked at Eddie, who turned away. "It wouldn't be the first time It's misled us, or lied to us somehow. There's no reason for It to be honest."

He didn't sound as confident as he perhaps hoped. His last sentence came out more like a question than a statement, and he turned to Bill for an answer.

"No," said Bill. "But..."

Now, suddenly, everyone was looking at him, and he knew from the looks on their faces that every single one of them knew what he was about to say.

But why would Richie react that way if it's not true?

"He didn't tell us," said Bill, and his voice was quiet and almost toneless, but Bev knew him well enough to interpret how he felt. He seemed numb, disbelieving, hurt. He said, *He didn't tell us*, but what he meant was, *How could he not tell us?*

So when she spoke, maybe her voice was a little harsher than it needed to be.

"Would you have told us?" she said. She glanced around at the other boys; most of them avoided her gaze. "It was the eighties, guys. It was fucking Derry, Maine. Population: ten thousand. You think there were *any* gay people out and proud in Derry back then? Let alone kids, let alone kids who were already getting beaten up on the daily just for having thick glasses and being a little too loud."

That word, *gay*, hung over them all like a toxic cloud. It shouldn't have bothered them like that — hell, it *hadn't* bothered any of them like that, Bev was sure, since they were kids. Since they grew up, since the world got smarter, since they moved to bigger cities, more open-minded places. Maybe it was just being in Derry again that made it seem so taboo, so frightening.

She cut her eyes at Eddie.

She remembered how terrified of AIDS he was back then.

He looked up, caught her staring at him, and she knew instantly that he remembered, too.

“Christ,” said Eddie. He turned away from the others, facing the wall, and pressed the heel of his palm against his forehead. If he pressed hard enough and squeezed his eyes shut, he knew there would be a mess of black spots and static swarming across his vision. Maybe that would be enough to block all this shit out.

Richie. In love. In love with *him*.

Jesus *Christ*.

“Can’t do this,” Eddie mumbled. The words were muffled against his hands. He prayed to God the others hadn’t heard — but of course they had, and a moment later he felt Mike’s hand on his shoulder, firm and comforting. Or meant to be comforting, at least. It wasn’t really doing the trick.

The thing was, even looking back, he wasn’t sure he could spot any evidence for it. Sure, Richie had teased him — teased him mercilessly — but he’d teased Stan, too, and there had been no longing looks, no flirting, no awkward compliments. He’d probably been insulted by Richie more in one year than most people were insulted by *anyone* in their entire lives. Hell, he’d been insulted by Richie ten times today, and it wasn’t even noon.

People don’t insult the one they’re in love with. That’s schoolboy shit.

And that, Eddie realized with a groan, meant it was 100% in line with what Richie would do. The guy was fucking famous and looked like he owned two outfits, ate ramen noodles for every meal, and had never even *seen* a comb in his life. He still had won-ton soup stains on his glasses from when they’d first come to town and faced it in the Chinese buffet. If any middle-aged man would handle a crush by

mercilessly insulting them, it would be Richie.

“Christ,” Eddie said into his hands. “Christ. Aw, Christ.”

“C’mon, Eddie,” said Bill, awkwardly shuffling his feet.

“I’m an *idiot*,” Eddie said. “How could I not—”

“None of us knew, man,” said Mike. His hand tightened on Eddie’s shoulder. It still wasn’t very comforting. “It’s not just you.”

“Yeah,” said Eddie. He let his hands fall from his face finally, staring at the ground. He heard a hollow laugh and realized it was coming from him. “Yeah, but it wasn’t *your* name on the fucking wedding invitation, was it?”

“I’ll check on him,” said Ben. He ducked out of the room before anyone — before Bev, specifically — could stop him, avoiding Bev’s hand when she reached for him on his way past. She’d said they should leave Richie alone, and maybe she was right, but he couldn’t just stay here in the sitting room trying to suss out Eddie’s emotional breakdown.

He knew Eddie was upset; what he couldn’t quite figure out was why. There were plenty of reasons, certainly, and they were arranged neatly in Ben’s head, as organized as the blueprints for his latest project.

One: Eddie was upset because one of his closest childhood friends turned out to be gay — and worse, turned out to be gay for him. It was undeniably the least generous way Ben could interpret Eddie’s reaction — but he couldn’t deny that it was stuck in his head, anyway.

They’d all been little brats when they were kids. They’d joked about Ben’s weight, and they’d all teased Stan for being a Jew, and Bev for being a girl, and Mike for being black and Bill for his stutter, and they’d called each other fags and fairies and anything else that came to mind. How much of it had been rooted in real prejudice? Was it at all possible for Eddie to be disgusted with Richie? Even now, though

he didn't want to believe it, Ben couldn't be sure.

Two: Eddie was upset not because Richie was gay or because Richie was — allegedly, according to a supernatural clown who had not, in Ben's opinion, proved himself trustworthy — in love with him, but only because Richie had kept that fact a secret.

Really, how many of them could honestly say they'd successfully kept a secret from the rest of the Losers Club? For none of them to know — for none of them to even suspect that Richie *had* a secret — was unbelievable. It was possible that Eddie only felt what all of them felt at that moment: hurt that Richie hadn't been comfortable enough to tell them, and maybe guilty over all the things each of them had said and done as kids to contribute to that discomfort.

Three — and God, this was the one that troubled Ben the most — Eddie was upset because ...

Well, because he felt the same way Richie did.

On the surface, it seemed ridiculous. But, in fairness, Ben would have said just an hour ago that Richie being gay was ridiculous. He'd seen the way Eddie reacted in there — hell, the little guy practically rubbed a hole in his own face out of stress. If he'd still had his aspirator, no doubt he'd be sucking on it, gazebo or not.

Outside Richie's room, Ben paused, his thoughts scattering. He took a deep breath, trying to be as quiet as he could. Inside, there were no sounds to indicate bags were being packed. Possibly, they'd already seen too much for any of them to bail again.

He knocked.

"Richie?"

There was no response.

"Hey, Richie," Ben said, leaning against the door. "C'mon, man, answer the door."

The silence inside wore on a bit longer. From downstairs, Ben could hear the rest of the Losers Club arguing about what had happened.

Could Richie hear them, too, even from inside his room? Had he heard everything they'd said already?

"We're all planning to grab some dinner," Ben lied, figuring if this ploy worked he could make it the truth easily enough. "You coming with?"

He almost fell down when the door opened behind him. He stumbled and righted himself quickly enough, unable to hide his surprise. Richie cocked an eyebrow at him, looking unimpressed.

"You know that clown's a fucking liar, right?" said Richie.

Of course, Ben reflected, Richie was more likely to eat a one-pound bag of Sour Patch Kids for breakfast than to seriously confess his love to anyone.

"Yeah, man," he said aloud, and he made sure his voice carried. Downstairs, the other losers hushed up instantly. "So, what are you thinking? Chinese? Burgers? Giant bag of candy?"

"Don't tempt me," Richie said.

By the time Richie and Ben reached the sitting room, the rest of them had caught onto the idea and were already waiting by the door, zipping up their jackets and trying to look casual.

"We decided on burgers," Mike said, though of course, they hadn't discussed any such thing. He glanced at Richie, who stood with his hands in his pockets and a neutral expression on his face, like no big secrets had been revealed today, like they hadn't recently faced a child-murdering clown.

His eyes were red-rimmed. He caught Mike staring and raised his eyebrows — but there was no quip, no teasing questions, no *Like what you see?*

Things had changed, Mike realized. After only one encounter with Pennywise, everything had changed. Behind him, Eddie stood with his back to the group, scowling at the floor, not even glancing up as Richie entered the room. Bill was smiling painfully; Bev couldn't hide

the sad twist to her mouth; and Ben stood at Richie's side with the air of an overprotective mother ready to catch her child when he falls.

He watched Richie's eyes dart to Eddie and away, lips tightening. He watched Eddie hunch his shoulders and pretend not to see.

More than anything, Mike wished he could pretend, too.